#### **Economic Focus**



- news and resources
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a quarterly update on the local economy provided by the Grand Junction Economic Partnership

# 'A more competitive Colorado'

**By Kelly Marlin** GJEP Business Development Manager kelly@gjep.org

**66 ★** n order to grow Colorado's economy, it is vital to engage Coloradans across the state in developing a comprehensive and collaborative approach to economic development."

With these words from Gov. John Hickenlooper's Executive Order 2011-003, the Grand Junction Economic Partnership (GJEP), along with its partners in economic development, are working diligently with the local business community to prepare a cohesive, community-wide economic development plan for Mesa

Knowing that local businesses are largely responsible for creating jobs in our community, it is imperative to engage them in order to best determine how to support and facilitate their ability to create even more jobs — and in so doing bolster our local economy.

To get the perspective of the business community, the economic development partners got to work and conducted a survey on the issue of community-wide economic development. More than 600 people responded to the survey that asked questions such as: "Why do you do business in the Grand Valley?" "Where are opportunities for job creation?" and "What industries have the most potential for growth and job creation?"

The next step was hosting an economic development planning session at Mesa State College where attendees were asked to share their thoughts, wishes and "big, hairy, audacious initiatives." The top three ideas that came from this event were to "become the most desired location for innovative energy business research and development," to "create a community brand and promote it," and

### GJEP helping to chart a new course for statewide economic development

finally to "reinvest to grow existing business, support businesses to obtain local, national and international work."

As evidenced by that list, great ideas were flowing and will be combined with survey data and incorporated into Mesa County's economic development plan.

The plan will begin by identifying the strengths that are so prevalent in our community. We will discuss the quality of life, our geographic location and status as a regional hub, the various recreational opportunities, and of course the great assets our community has in Mesa State College and other educational institutions.

The plan will identify the industries that are primed for growth in the region and will of course spell out specific strategies for growth in both new and existing businesses and industries. Also included in the plan will be ways in which we can continue to promote tourism — a significant economic driver.

This process began a few months ago when Gov. Hickenlooper, members of his senior staff, a host of economic development professionals from the region and the community at large attended a brainstorming session at the brand new Fruita Community Center.

This session provided an opportunity to present ideas, hear feedback and further the goal of becoming a "more competitive Colorado." The planning doesn't end with the Mesa County economic development plan. In fact, that is just the beginPlanning participants stated their wish for Grand Junction to "become the most desired location for innovative energy business research and development."

ning. All 64 Colorado counties have been asked to create or revise plans which will be rolled into 14 regional plans which will then be combined into one statewide "bottom-up economic development plan."

The goal for completion of the countywide plan is April 15 with the regional plans striving to be completed by May 15. At that point the state will take over and prepare a state-wide economic development plan.

GJEP is committed to the economic vitality of our region and we look at this planning session as a way to share our ideas with the rest of the state and work together to make our area an even better place to live and work. If you have not yet seen the results of the survey, or are interested in notes from the planning session visit www.gjep.org/News---Media.aspx.

#### **Economic Development Survey Results**

Following are the top three answers to selected questions for the economic development survey that was circulated through the community. To view the complete survey results, please visit http://gjep.org/News---Media.aspx

- Top 3 reasons to do business in the Grand Valley:
  - 1. Overall quality of life 72%
  - Geographic location 58%
  - Access to multiple recreation opportunities 38%
- Major challenges to doing business in the Grand Valley:
  - 1. Regulatory environment 30%
  - Access to capital 29%
  - Lack of local/regional customers 29%
- Major opportunities for job creation and business growth:
  - 1. Support of energy development sector 53%
  - 2. Assist existing businesses expand 50%
  - Attract new businesses through marketing and incentives - 39%
- How should the State support job creation and growth of **Grand Valley businesses:** 
  - 1. Incentives for job growth 41%
  - Tax credits for job growth 40%
  - 3. Streamline regulations 39%
- How should local cities and the county support job creation and growth of Grand Valley businesses:
  - 1. Incentives for job growth 49%
  - Streamline regulations 46%
  - Tax credits for job growth 40%
- Which sectors of the local economy have the best potential for growth and job creation:
  - 1. Energy or mining 64%
  - Healthcare 49%
  - Manufacturing 41%

#### What is GJEP?

The Grand Junction Economic Partnership (GJEP) is a private non-profit economic development organization for Mesa County.

This partnership represents the cities of Grand Junction and Fruita, the Town of Palisade and Mesa County. GJEP's mission is to shape a strong and stable economy, with diverse industries and quality jobs for Mesa County residents. GJEP works to attract new primary businesses to Mesa County and assists local businesses with expansion

The Grand Junction Economic Partnership is your first point of contact if you are looking to expand or relocate your company in the Grand Junction area. GJEP provides the resources, information and services you need to make the right decision for your company. GJEP services are available to you at no cost or obligation and include:

- Area overviews and custom
- Market information and data • Site selection assistance
- Labor market analysis Custom research
- Financial contacts
- Employment recruitment
- Workforce development assistance
- Customized job-training programs Access to public officials and
- regulatory authorities Coordination of state and local incentive and financial assistance programs
- Building and build-to-suit coordination
- Communications and media

Visit GJEP online at gjep.org or call 970-245-4332. GJEP is located in at 122 N. 6th St.

## Biomass shows promise in Fruita

**By Penny Stine** Special Sections Staff Writer penny.stine@gjsentinel.com

The Grand Valley doesn't look like Silicon Valley any more than Calvin Pearson looks like Steve Jobs. But the research in bioenergy that Pearson and his colleagues are undertaking could provide solutions for the nation's transportation fuel woes that have the potential to be as revolutionary as the

Dr. Pearson is a Colorado State University research agronomist at the Fruita Agricultural Experiment Station. He's part of The Western Colorado Carbon Neutral Bioenergy Consortium (WCCNBC), a group that includes Colorado Mountain College, the city of Rifle, Garfield County and the Flux Farm Foundation, a research and education foundation dedicated to integrating sustainable practices and renewable energy onto farms in the intermountain West.

"I'm tired of volatile transportation fuel costs," Pearson said. "Tired of talk of foreign oil dependence."

Pearson and his colleagues are researching biomass crops and the feasibility of turning them into biofuels, specifically butanol. Unlike ethanol, biobutanol does not have to be blended with gasoline to run in vehicles, is suited for pipeline transportation, does not require engine modification for vehicles to use, is less corrosive and has a higher energy content than ethanol.

Their research is in its infancy, but the group has developed some guidelines that could make it a more economically viable option than corn-based ethanol.

"You have to grow it so it doesn't compete with food resources or feedstock," Pearson said. "We want to produce biomass on marginal land, under-utilized land or reclaimed land."

The group is also dedicated to producing biomass with a limited amount of fertilizer, water and labor. It needs to be inexpensive to grow and inexpensive to produce biofuels from whatever crop is grown for fuel.

Pearson has been experimenting with switchgrass, a warm-season perennial grass, at the Fruita location. Other researches will grow different

Fuel project demonstrates Grand Valley's potential to become the 'Silicon Valley' of energy development



AT THE WESTERN COLORADO RESEARCH CENTER in Fruita, Dr. Calvin Pearson, professor of soil and crop sciences at Colorado State University is growing switchgrass to determine if it's an economically viable biomass for a pilot biofuels processing plant under construction in Rifle.

types of perennial grasses in Rifle and Carbondale. This will be the second season for switchgrass in Fruita. The Rifle grasses were planted late last summer, and researchers planted in Carbondale this spring.

"We need the public to get behind this and make it happen," said Pearson, who also said the process of turning a perennial grass into a viable transportation fuel is highly technical and highly complicated. "If people have the incentive to understand it, they will. This is going to be in their lives or we're going to pay five dollars a gallon for Jon Prater, an integrative energy

technology instructor with Colorado Mountain College, is in the process of building a pilot processing plant with the capacity to process 400 gallons of fluid at a time. The plant sits behind the college and has relied on donations from industry partners to equip the plant with

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"I'm tired of volatile transportation fuel costs; tired of talk of foreign oil dependence."

-Calvin Pearson, Ph.D. Colorado State University research agronomist